

17. GECKOS AS FOOD OF MAGPIE ROBIN

On 2 August 1995, I was watching birds in the courtyard of my bungalow in Morena, north Madhya Pradesh, when my attention was caught by a wriggling gecko in the mouth of a magpie robin (*Copsychus saularis*). The rain had stopped half an hour earlier after a very heavy downpour. The gecko that was probably weak after enduring the rain, was caught by the bird, that ripped open its stomach. The sub-adult gecko died soon. The bird jerked it to take out the softer inner parts.

Soon a fledgling magpie robin descended from a tree on to the wet ground, and the male parent began to feed it with the softer inner

organs of the gecko. From the skin, the gecko was identified as Brook's gecko (*Hemidactylus brooki*).

Earlier, in a similar incident on 26 July 1995, a magpie robin was seen to feed on a dead northern house gecko (*H. flaviviridis*).

The magpie robin normally feeds on insects picked off the ground and flower nectar. These two species of gecko are recorded here as the food of this bird.

February 27, 1997

RAJIV SAXENA

MIG-853, Darpan Colony,
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18. RANGE EXTENSION OF WHITE WAGTAIL *MOTACILLA ALBA LEUCOPSIS* AT POCHARAM LAKE, MEDAK DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

On 12th January 1997, we visited Pocharam Lake, 18° 8' N, 78° 10' E (part of Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary, Medak dist. Andhra Pradesh), to count waterfowl for the Asian Waterfowl Census. For this purpose, we sat on the eastern shore of the lake, approximately 15 m from the edge of the water. The shore was covered with grass stubble, a few *Prosopis* bushes, and littered with small stones and broken boulders. Among the various species of birds present on this narrow strip of land between the water's edge and us, we noticed what seemed like two different races of the white wagtail *Motacilla alba*.

On closer examination through binoculars and telescope, we confirmed that there were indeed two races of the white wagtail, quite clearly distinguishable from each other by the differences in their plumage. One was identified as either *Motacilla alba dukhunensis* or *M. a. baicalensis*. Two specimens of the former race have been collected in Andhra Pradesh earlier (Ali and Whistler 1932, Majumdar 1984), and

so it is possible that these birds were *dukhunensis*. though there is nothing to prevent from being *baicalensis*, as both are indistinguishable from each other in winter. However, there is no record (specimen) of *baicalensis* from South India (S. Unnithan 1997, Bombay Natural History Society, *in litt*).

The other race in question could be identified with more conviction and accuracy. There were two birds with a black back, black cap, white forehead, white sides of head and neck (including the lores region) and a black bib. The only two races which have a black back are *M. a. alboides* and *M. a. leucopsis* (Ali and Ripley 1987). The former has black ear-coverts, and the latter white ear-coverts. The birds we saw certainly *did not have black ear-coverts* (a sketch was made in the field). This is, therefore, an extension of the known range of this race, which is reported from N.E. India, with the western most record from eastern Uttar Pradesh and also Andaman Islands (Ali and Ripley 1987). The possibility also remains that they are spread over

a much larger area all the time, but have been overlooked as just another "White Wagtail"!

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19. WHITE-EYE (*ZOSTEROPS PALPEBROSA*) FEEDING THE CHICKS OF PARADISE FLYCATCHER (*TERPSIPHONE PARADISI*)

We were birdwatching near Udaipur on 13th July, 1996. At 0930 hrs we found a nest of paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) on a bare branch of a mango tree (*Mangifera indica*). We observed the birds from a distance of about 15 m from the nest, behind some bushes. There were four chicks in the nest and both the male and female were feeding their nestlings. Soon we saw that on a leafy part of the same branch, two white-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosa*) were darting in and out of the leaves. We found the nest of the white-eyes about 2 m from the nest of the paradise flycatcher on the same branch.

At 1015 hrs, the frequency of feeding by the paradise flycatcher slowed down. Both the birds flew away, out of the vicinity of their nest. At this juncture, one of the white-eyes came and perched

on top of the nest of the paradise flycatcher. The chicks raised their necks with wide open beaks and begged for food. The white-eye fed the chicks, or at least was seen to put its beak into the mouths of two nestlings. When the chicks calmed down, the white-eye started feeding on the nest material of the paradise flycatcher's nest. The rocking of the nest agitated the chicks and the white-eye once again calmed them down by putting its beak in the mouth of the chicks.

It remained on the nest for three minutes and then flew away.

22nd October, 1996

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20. SHORT TAILED AGAMA IN SOUTHEAST RAJASTHAN

A small lizard was caught on 25 December 1994 from Sorsan Bustard closed area in Baran dist. in southeast Rajasthan. On a warm afternoon in winter, it was scurrying from one jujube bush to another. The lizard was caught and measured. Its total length was 85 mm, of

which 37 mm was tail and 48 mm snout to vent length. It had a triangular head, a well defined neck and upper body variegated with dark brown irregular lines and circular spots along the spine. The ventral surface was pale with faint brown lines on the lower jaw and belly. Front and hind